

TIGHT BINDING BOOK

**TEXT FLY WITHIN
THE BOOK ONLY**

UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY

OU_162437

UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY

OSMANIA UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

Call No. 597/P35F Accession No. 2072

Author Pearce Frank L

Title Fish Tales n.d

This book should be returned on or before the date
last marked below.



THE AUTHOR FISHING IN JAMAICA

FISH TALES

Tropical and Otherwise

By
FRANK L. PEARCE

Illustrated with Plates



"The Bazaar, Exchange & Mart" Ltd.
Link House, Greville Street, London, E.C.1

MADE AND PRINTED
IN GREAT BRITAIN

CONTENTS

	PAGE
I SNOOK, SANDFISH AND OTHERS ..	II
II AN ADVENTUROUS DAY ..	23
III TWO TARPON	30
IV MORE MOUNTAIN MULLET	39
V FISH AND "FISH-POTS"	47
VI A SHARK STORY	55
VII SOME BIG FISH	59
VIII A LOST ROD	66
IX STRANGE MOUNTAIN MISHAPS	72
X FIRST EXPERIENCES IN CANADIAN WATERS	80

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

THE AUTHOR FISHING IN JAMAICA ..	Frontispiece
	FACING PAGE
IRRIGATION CANAL	16
BLUE HOLE, PORT ANTONIO	62
BOG WALK GORGE	72

Acknowledgments are due to the Proprietors of "Chambers's Journal," and "The Fishing Gazette" for permission to reproduce articles which first appeared in those magazines.

FISH TALES

CHAPTER I

SNOOK, SANDFISH AND OTHERS

WHEN I lived in Jamaica I used to spend a good deal of my leisure time in fishing the streams and the bays of that picturesque little mountain isle, which has been rightly termed a "Land of Springs." Its name is derived from the Arawak Indian word "Xaymaca," signifying an abundance of rivers. When Columbus was asked by the Spanish queen to describe the appearance of the island, he aptly responded by crumpling a sheet of paper and casting it on the table.

The mountain streams abound with fish, and especially with "mountain mullet," one of the famous table delicacies of the West Indies. They are readily caught with morsels of the *avocado* pear, also a table delicacy. Wading the streams armed with a six-ounce fly-rod, a fine trout-cast weighted with a couple of buck-shot, and a No. 8 hook, I have had many a tussle with these game little fish, and have caught them

in weight varying from a quarter-pound to one and three-quarters. They rarely reach two pounds, although I have heard of (but have never seen) fish reputed to scale three pounds. Broiled in a plantain-leaf on the river's bank, they have a flavour that cannot be beaten.

There is a variety of other fish in the rivers ; and in the bays and the harbours tarpon may be caught. These have been taken up to one hundred and forty pounds.

I was once fishing in a canoe at the mouth of the Carbaritta River, which empties its waters into the Caribbean Sea on the northwest coast of Jamaica. We were fishing for "snook," which may best be described as the fresh water shark of the island. The flesh of this large fish (they run up to fifty and sixty pounds) is rather coarse, but the young ones make a very palatable dish.

We were using as live bait a vigorous little black fish about two inches long with a big head, somewhat like a giant tadpole. The natives claim that these fish live through the dry season embedded in the mud of the dried-up creeks. Anyhow, they are great bait for snook, and rejoice in the elegant name of "Godamy." This name naturally excited my curiosity, and while waiting for bites I inquired of the boatman as to its origin, and he enlightened me as follows, in the native vernacular :

"Well, massa," he began, "dem say de ting

come 'bout in dis way. W'en de Ahlmighty was putting names 'pon all de libbing creachers at de beginning ob de worl', him really work hard, massa. Him name de bird and de beas' and de fowl ob de air and de fishes ob de sea, and de ribbers, and Him name Adam and Ebe, and ebery libbing ting, and when ebbing come, massa, de Ahlmighty tired fe true, so Him go fe res' Himself and to tek de cool breeze, but as Him siddown to wipe de sweat off Him brow, Him see a little-little black fish a-coming swimming, swimming right up to de Ahlmighty and de fish open him mout' and him say :

" ' Lord, yo' don't name me ! "

" And de Ahlmighty vex. Him say ' Cho ! What boderation is dis ? Me tink me finish done, and now dis fool-fool little fish come boder me.' So Him say gruff to de fish :

" ' Ah, who you ? "

" And de fish him say :

" ' God ! Ah me ! "

" ' Ahright,' say de Ahlmighty, ' take de name and go ! "

" And dat is why, young massa, de fish name is ' Godamy.' "

I was permitting a smile to relax my features but checked it on observing the gaze of the boatman fixed seriously on me as he gravely remarked:

" Yes, massa, and I well believe it is true."

I sometimes used to visit a friend who owned

a sugar plantation in the mountainous district of the island where the famous Jamaica Rum is distilled. It was a beautiful spot, with rustling fields of green cane plants shimmering in the tropical sun in the centre of an almost perfect amphitheatre of hills, clad with cocoa-palms, banana trees and other luxuriant tropical growth. A subterranean river emerged from the ground on one side of the valley and was harnessed to drive the crushing mill of the factory, disappearing in a small lake at the farther end of the property. There were no fish in its waters, but on a near-by plantation there was a mountain stream abounding with mullet, and there I used to hie me each day during the period of my visit.

I was driving back one evening through a native village which bordered the road when a large dog rushed out of a hut and charged my car, barking furiously. He regretted his impulsiveness too late when he found that he would furnish a repast that evening for the turkey buzzards of the neighbourhood, but, in the words of the song, he only had himself to blame. Next morning I was accosted on the river bank by a stalwart peasant who civilly touched his hat and said :

“ Marning, Squire.”

“ Good morning,” I answered. “ Who are you ?”

“ Me, Peter Macfarlane, sah. I bring you

some ppear, sah," producing two stunted specimens of the vegetable pear I have already mentioned as used for bait. I thanked him and gave him a tip, but he still lingered, uneasily shuffling his bare feet.

"Well," I inquired, "what are you waiting for?"

"Squire," he said, hesitatingly, "Squire, a great misfartune befall me yesterday."

"Yes," I said, "and what was that?"

"Squire, I lose me darg, sah."

"Oh!" I said. "It was your dog that ran into my car, eh?"

"Yes, Squire."

"Well my good man, I am very sorry, but it was not my fault, you know. The dog ran into my car."

"Yes, Squire, so I heah. But you not gwine to compensate me, sah?"

"Not a red cent," I informed him.

His face fell and he went away grumbling. A little while later his landlord, the owner of the estate, a worthy retired physician, joined me on the river's bank and inquired:

"What is this I hear? You've killed Macfarlane's dog?"

I answered in the affirmative and explained the circumstances.

"My dear fellow," said the doctor, "my wife will not be able to thank you sufficiently. She could never keep an egg in the hen house on

account of that brute. Come up to the house and have breakfast."

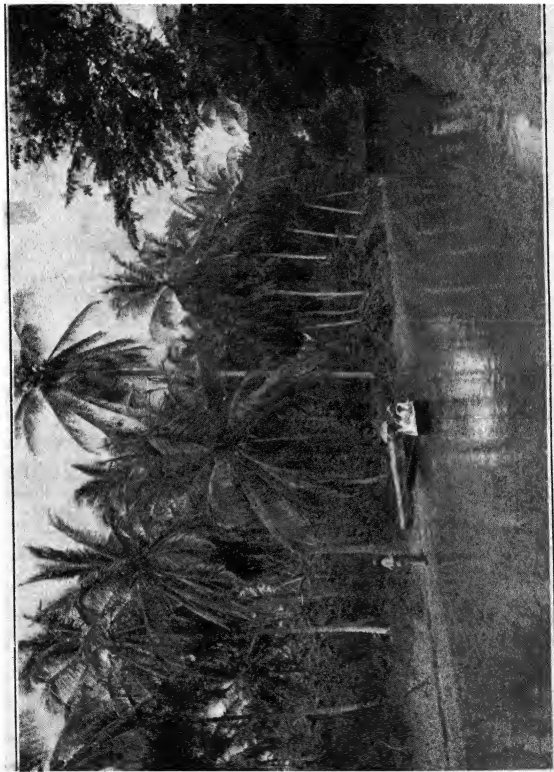
En passant, I may remark that automobiles were not popular with the natives in those days. They called them devilments, and did not hesitate to cast a stone when they could do so unobserved. I was amused one morning to hear two plantation labourers outside my bedroom window discussing the nature of my car which was being washed down by my boy.

"Hi!" said one. "How dem ting gallop widout harse, eh?"

"Cho, man!" replied the other. "It no hab (does it not have) 'team ingine into it?"

This explanation quite satisfied his companion's thirst for information.

My favourite fishing resort was situated in the beautiful gorge of the Rio Cobre (Copper River), which flows from the mountains skirting the plains and passing through the ancient Spanish capital, formerly called St. Jago de la Vega (St. James of the Plain), but now known as Spanish Town. Here are many fine old buildings, including the oldest cathedral in the West Indies, and a marble statue by the sculptor, Bacon, of Admiral Lord Rodney, who defeated the French Fleet under Count De Grasse when it was on its way to capture the island in the year 1782.



IRRIGATION CANAL

Just below the river's exit from the gorge, a great dam diverts a portion of its waters into canals which irrigate the cane-fields and banana plantations of the surrounding plains. Beneath the dam is a very large and deep pool alive with a variety of fish, including *calipeva* (the Jamaica salmon), snook, hog-nosed and mountain mullet, drummer, sandfish and numbers of eels, which were a great nuisance in taking your line into the rocks. The natives objected very much to taking the eels off the hooks, saying, "No, massa, me 'fraid fe him. Him going wrap me. Him favour snake."

The steep slope of the dam terminated in a broad ledge which shot out under the water, and it was possible when the river was low to wade out on this ledge and fish towards the rapids below, but it was necessary to use the utmost care, for the ledge was moss-grown and very slippery, and the rushing water made the footing most precarious. When the water was turbid it was impossible to see the end of the ledge, and one afternoon I unthinkingly walked over the edge wearing a heavy pair of rubber thigh-boots. When I rose to the surface I was just able to keep my head above water by gripping the slimy ledge, but my waders felt like lead each time I tried to raise my knees over the edge of the dam, and the force of the tons of water sliding down the slope was of course very hard to oppose. There was no one in sight and my predicament

was fast becoming serious ; in fact, I was almost all in, when in one of my efforts my toes encountered a narrow projection in the masonry a few feet below the edge of the dam, and from this I was able, after resting a while, to scramble back on the ledge pretty well exhausted and scared. I lost my favourite landing net from my belt, but to my surprise I found that my rod was still tightly clutched in my left hand.

I was careful ever after to give the brink a wide berth, but I had a companion in misfortune one morning when my servant boy fell in, although I had warned him to be careful to keep away from the edge, for he informed me that he could not swim, having been brought up in the mountains. However, he rolled up his trouser-legs and followed me on to the dam barefooted. It was not long before I was into a good-sized fish, and shouted for the landing net. The boy came running eagerly behind me and then I heard a tremendous splash, and on looking round I found he had vanished from view. But the next moment a terror-stricken black face with staring white eyeballs and gaping mouth broke the surface as he yelled frantically, " Massa, I drowning, I drowning, sah !" For a moment I was in a quandary how to rescue him, for if I went near the slimy edge and he should pull me in with my heavy rubber boots on, it meant good-bye for both of us ; then I thought of the rod, and quickly slacking off line, I re-

versed it and pushed him the butt which he clutched like grim death as I drew him on to the dam. On reeling up I was surprised to find the fish still on the line, and I eventually netted him—a nice sandfish.

These fish are very voracious, and if you had a blank day otherwise, you could nearly always “save your face” by worming for them in the depths with a heavy sinker. Even though not hooked, I have known them to hold on to the bait until drawn up to the surface, when they would reluctantly open their wide jaws and sink back into the depths. They are delicious eating, but most repulsive to look at, with an enormous head, behind which a pair of fins sprout laterally like whiskers. They give no sport, but come in like a log after a few minutes’ wriggling. I once felt a bite on my line from one of these creatures, but hadn’t reeled in very far when I felt a tremendous tug, and on raising my quarry to the surface found he was a large sandfish, who calmly opened his jaws and disgorged the smaller fish of his own kind which I had originally hooked, and which he had seized like a cannibal on its way up. I got him later on, however, for there is hardly any limit to their greediness.

My best catch in this pool was a hog-nosed mullet, weighing seven and three-quarter pounds. The river was a milky colour, just clearing after a flood, and I was searching out the pool with

what the natives call a silver shrimp as live bait. This shrimp is a fresh water crustacean with a slender body so transparent that it can be seen through. I had worked along the breastwork of the dam to the opposite bank when there was a rush and a gleam of silver, and almost before I realized it the fish had flashed across to the far edge of the pool verging on the rapids. Steady pressure checked him there, and a series of short dashes towards the near bank followed. I had to treat him gingerly, for my rod was light and the leader a fine trout-cast. When I finally got him in the centre of the pool he proceeded to bore down with a constant swaying motion, as if trying to plumb the depths. After fifteen or twenty minutes of steady strain, he showed symptoms of weakening and I was able to bring him near the edge of the dam, but the force of the current made the pressure enormous, and he still had strength enough to resist being guided into the slack water. Each time he made a rush as I cautiously applied increased pressure, very fearful of my slender tackle. Just as I was despairing of ever landing him, I spied a native on the canal bank in the distance, and a series of ear-splitting yells at last penetrated the clamour of the water and brought the man running to my help, and with his assistance the net was slipped under my silver beauty as I brought him up to the brink the next time. The flesh of this fish

is most delicate. It gets its name from a projecting upper lip with which it is supposed to dig up the mud on the river bottom in search of its food.

The *calipeva* is another grand sporting fish. It has no visible teeth and its only food is vegetable matter, chiefly a weed called "morass" by the natives, and also a silky-looking moss which it sucks from submerged stones. For years it was a problem to catch them, as the weed would float off the hook as you cast, but a friend of mine improvised a sliding collar of gut by which you secured the moss after festooning it through the double gut above the hook, and he was very successful in catching them. They are exceedingly wary fish, and it was sometimes most tantalizing to see them dashing around the pools in shoals, swarming about your bait which the strong current kept floating on the surface. They would nose it and push against it, or even flick it contemptuously with their tails; in fact, do everything but swallow it. Then occasionally you would feel a tug and strike sharply to find the hook stripped. I was never skilful enough to do much execution among them. The largest I caught weighed three and a half pounds.

While standing on the dam I sometimes noticed numbers of young mullet skipping up the slope, and on one occasion I asked an old African to get me some for live bait, when he

surprised me by standing on the slope and holding a round flat basket waist high. "Arl-right, massa," he said, in reply to my inquiry, "hab patience. I soon ketch dem, wait little." And sure enough, several of the little fellows soon came skipping into his basket and were captured.

CHAPTER II

AN ADVENTUROUS DAY

THE gamest little fish in the world is the West Indian mountain mullet, which abounds in the streams of the island of Jamaica. Although small in size, averaging about a pound but rarely exceeding two pounds in weight, it is a fighter to the core, and as it is extremely shy and wary, the finest tackle has to be used if you wish to be successful in taking it, so plenty of sport is afforded the angler in effecting its capture.

The mountain mullet is a silver-grey fish, with dark markings shading its back, and must not be confounded with the larger blue-grey sea-mullet which frequents the sea at the mouths of the rivers, for the mountain mullet is found only in the swiftest streams of the hills, playing about in the foam of the falls and in the pools of the rapids, but seldom venturing down to the river mouth.

The island of Jamaica is almost wholly mountainous, except where the alluvial plains stretch from the foot of the hills to meet the waters of the blue Caribbean Sea. The moun-

tains generally traverse the island from east to west, the most lofty range being the central range of Blue Mountains, on whose slopes the famous Blue Mountain coffee is grown.

Kingston, the capital of the island, lies on the Liguanea Plain, which slopes southernly to the sea from the foot of the central range. One of the sources of the city's water supply is by way of an ancient tunnel, which runs through the ridge of hills at its lowest point, and taps the waters of the Wag Water River on the northern slope of the range. This river was originally called *Agua Alta* (High Water) by the Spaniards, but native usage has now corrupted the name to "Wag Water."

Hearing that there were some sizeable mullet to be taken in the upper reaches of the river, I obtained permission from the Water Works authorities to go through the tunnel, and so cut off a circuitous climb over the tangled ridge of the mountain; but I must confess that I contemplated the venture with some misgiving, when on presenting myself at the tunnel's mouth I perceived it to be an opening some four feet in diameter, and found that it was necessary for me to prostrate myself face downward on a hand-trolley, and to remain in that position while a stalwart African, crouching behind, would push me along the rails through the bowels of the mountain for nearly one-third of a mile.

Visions of earthquakes and landslides loomed

up before me. Tradition had it that the tunnel was dug out in times of slavery by unfortunate blacks under hard taskmasters, and that several lives were sacrificed in the undertaking. It was stated that digging had been started at both ends simultaneously, and had been so accurately carried out that the boring parties had met in the centre with but little deviation from the true alignment.

It was not my desire to add to the toll of human sacrifice, so I anxiously inquired of my sable guide whether it was perfectly safe to go through, and if there were any danger of the water being turned on while we were inside.

"Quite safe, massa, quite safe," he grinned. "Ebery week we walk troo. De Boss telephone de sluice-man to lock off de water, 'cause we comin' troo. Don' frighten, Massa, it quite safe. Get aboard, sar," he added cheerily, splashing into the water up to his knees.

Accepting his assurance with some considerable doubt, I put my best face on the matter and took up my undignified position on the trolley and we started. A wire-bound storm-lantern on the front of the trolley shed fitful rays on the dripping roof and walls as we proceeded on our way, my attendant pushing vigorously with much splashing and heavy breathing. I did not feel at all comfortable, and was indeed relieved when, on cautiously lifting up my head, after what seemed hours of slow progress, I

could see a pin-point of light glimmering in the far distance, and finally was once more able to drink in the pure air and sunlight of the outer world.

The intake of the tunnel was amply protected by a dam wall and sluice gate. This gate was opened as soon as we were out, and the waters of the mountain stream rushed back foaming into the narrow opening. Away up the mountain the river gleamed through the tangle of tropical growth, leaping from fall to fall, and eddying around large rocks and smooth-worn boulders. In the deep blue pools where it had cut away the mountain-side the feathery bamboos trailed their branches.

I was equipped with waders, so I put my rod together and climbed along the banks of the stream. I had on a light trout-cast, equipped with a couple of buck-shot, and a No. 6 hook, and for bait was using morsels of the famous vegetable (*avocado*) pear. I picked up one or two small fish on my way, but saw no indications of any sizeable fish as I walked up the stream until I reached a clump of bamboos which grew thickly on a high bluff overhanging a sharp bend of the river. Making my way cautiously through the dense tangle of creaking stems I reached the edge of the bluff and, lying face-downward, was delighted to see in the swirling blue pool some twelve feet below a shoal of large mullet playing about, their silvery sides gleaming

in the clear water as they darted around with their noses up-stream, looking for what might come down.

The bamboo brake overhung the pool so thickly that it was somewhat difficult to get the point of my rod through the foliage without frightening the fish, but I eventually did so, and the morsel of pear had hardly sunk beneath the surface of the water when there was a gleam and a rush, and I hooked a fine fellow with a turn of the wrist. From my height above the water, the movements of the fish could clearly be seen, and it was interesting to watch how closely his fellows followed the frantic rushes of the captive. Seemingly they imagined he had secured a prize and were anxious to share it.

When his struggle had tired him out, it was then a problem how to land him without breaking the fine tackle ; but by careful manœuvring I finally succeeded in slowly sliding the exhausted fish up a sloping part of the bluff until I was able to reach him with my landing net.

His untimely fate did not diminish the ardour of his companions, who continued to swoop greedily on the tempting morsels which I presented to them. And it was not until I had seven of the beauties (their weight varied from three-quarters to one pound) safely nestling in my bag that the rest became wary and retreated to the recesses of the pool.

By this time the rays of the tropic sun were

too fierce for comfort, and I took refuge in the cool shade of an overhanging rock and discussed my sandwiches.

An ominous peal of thunder and the gathering of dark clouds on the mountain tops warned me, however, not to linger over my meal, as the usual afternoon thunderstorm would soon be bursting on the scene.

I accordingly made my way as quickly as I could down the rocky overgrown tangle of the river-bed ; but the clouds burst before I could reach the sluice-keeper's shed, and in a few minutes I was drenched to the skin by the heavy downpour. It was all over in twenty minutes, and the sun shone forth fiercely again, making the moist air steam like a Turkish bath. Hot, wet, and uncomfortable, I felt that it would be too risky to court a tropical fever by continuing to fish in wet clothes, and I decided to return.

I found my dusky henchman waiting for me at the sluice-gate, which was quickly closed, and as soon as the tunnel had run dry I embarked on the trolly on my return subterranean voyage. My steersman was just as eager as myself to return to our starting point ; but heedless of the old adage, which warns " more haste less speed," he applied undue force in rounding the midway curve of the tunnel and ran the trolly clean off the rails, sending myself and the storm-lantern tumbling to the floor. Fortunately, the light did not go out, and I was so wet and dirty

already that the fall mattered little to me. My sable attendant was most profuse and humble in his apologies, and after we had replaced the trolly on the rails he proceeded more carefully, and we reached the tunnel mouth without further mishap. There I administered *largesse* to him, and hied me homeward well satisfied with my catch, but fully resolved to follow another route should I ever again visit the upper reaches of the "Wag Water" River.

CHAPTER III

TWO TARPON

Tarpon No. 1.

"HELLO, Hello!" phoned my friend Andrews. "The fishermen tell me that the tarpon are running in the harbour to-day. What do you say if we go out to-morrow morning?"

I willingly agreed and the small hours of the next morning found me on my way to the house of my friend, who lived on the water's edge on the eastern outskirts of the city of Kingston, the capital of the island of Jamaica.

He owned a small rowing boat with an out-board motor, and we were soon chugging along to the ferry wharf where we were to get bait from the fleet of fishing canoes which had been out at sea all night.

It was a lovely morning. The fierce rays of the tropic sun were not yet visible above the horizon, but there was just a faint glow in the east, outlining the masses of white cloud which lay along the rim of the ocean, giving promise of strong trade winds later on in the day. Landward the peaks of the lofty range of the Blue Mountains were still covered with the night

mists which clung to their sides and nestled in the valleys.

The waters of the harbour were almost mirror-like in their stillness, except when a puff of cool air from the mountains streaked the peaceful surface, rustling the feathery branches of the coco-palms which fringed the shore.

On reaching the ferry wharf we found a lively fish market in progress, and we were quickly surrounded by chattering natives.

"Hey, massa, yo' wan' buy de mackerel? Dem sweet for true."

"Red snapper, massa—red snapper? Dem raly lubly!"

"No mind dem, *buccra*, (white man)," shouted an old weatherbeaten darky, elbowing his way to our boat. "Ah see you 'gwine fishening, an' mullet is de bait fo' de tarpon, *buccra*."

It was mullet we were after, and making a judicious purchase, we pursued our way to our intended fishing ground. The tarpon had been seen the previous day, breaking the surface near two oil-tank steamers, which had recently arrived to supply the ships-of-war on the station, and we had determined to fish in their vicinity, as fish are always attracted to the droppings from a vessel.

We anchored our boat some fifty yards away, and then proceeded to bait the locality by shredding the mullet into fine morsels and casting hands-

ful into the sea. We were equipped with two-jointed tarpon rods with a pulley on the top joint, and we used leaders of fine punjab wire. With the help of a baiting needle, we concealed the hook in a triangular-shaped section of mullet, drawing it carefully shank foremost through the bait so that it was entirely concealed, for the tarpon is a very suspicious customer. Then casting the lines (unweighted) as far from the boat as possible, we allowed the bait to sink slowly into the depths and settled down to wait for whatever luck might ensue.

Meanwhile, we passed the time quickly by fishing alongside, using handlines baited with shrimp or scraps of mullet, pulling into the boat numbers of small blue-white fish, broad and flat in shape, which Andrews called "whiting," but which looked to me very much like "young jack."

Suddenly he gave a shout: "Holy smoke! I've got a father of a bite!"

The words were hardly out of his mouth, when there was a tremendous flurry on the surface about twenty yards away, and a gleaming silvery body leaped curving into the air and fell back on the surface with a resounding splash.

"Well, what do you know about that?" remarked Andrews, with a bewildered expression on his face, as he hauled in his handline, the bait of which had been seized by the tarpon and ejected in mid-air. "I wish he had taken my

rod-line. That fellow must have weighed fifty pounds at least!"

This run, however, seemed likely to be the extent of our luck, for we got no more bites, although every now and then we could see the backs of the great fish breaking the surface nearby, as they swam around in search of small fry. The time passed on without any result, and as the sun's rays began to make themselves unpleasantly felt, we moved into the cool shadow of the tank-boat, determined to make another attempt before shaping a homeward course.

At last our patience was rewarded, for I suddenly observed the slack coils of my line silently slipping over the gunwale. Seizing the butt of the rod with both hands, I waited until the slack had run out, and then I struck with all my might. Immediately I felt the rush of a heavy fish as the line shot away at full speed and the reel spun around with lightning velocity, despite the vigorous application of the check.

Up into the air flashed the silvery beauty, not once but a dozen times in quick succession in vain attempts to get rid of the embedded hook, and for the next twenty minutes the big fish raged furiously around, making frantic rushes in every direction, more often in the air than in the water, and at times boring the depths in his efforts to escape. I kept on as heavy a strain as possible and finally the rushes

grew weaker, and applying pressure, I began to bring him towards the boat.

By this time a group of onlookers had gathered at the ship's taffrail above me and were interested spectators as I brought the exhausted fish alongside. Andrews, who had been fearfully excited during the struggle, showering words of advice upon me, now seized the gaff-hook and with "one fell swoop" plunged it at the tarpon and severed the wire leader two inches above the hook. The tired fish sank gracefully into the depths, its eyes beaming with gratitude, while Andrews turned to me his horror-stricken face.

"I am awfully sorry, old chap," he faltered.

It was hard work, but I forced my features into a pleasant smile. "My dear fellow, it doesn't matter a bit. It might have happened to anyone," I murmured softly.

Inwardly I condemned him as a clumsy fool and would have given worlds to have been able to kick him overboard after the fish, and it was evident that I had sympathizers, for a shrill voice from the taffrail exclaimed loudly: "Well, if that happened to me, I know what I would say." I took off my hat to the lady.

Tarpon No. 2.

My next attempt was made with another companion! We hired a boat (a native dug-out) from a fisherman, who paddled us down to

the western end of the harbour, near to the outlet of the Rio Cobre.

Near the mouth of the river is the village of Passage Fort, famous as the landing place of the English forces sent out by Cromwell in the year 1655, when he wrested the island from Spain.

We anchored close to old Fort Augusta, once a formidable defence, but now a dilapidated ruin. It presented a lively appearance a few years ago, however, when it was faked up as a Moorish City, by Annette Kellerman and her company of moving picture players, for it was here that many of the scenes of her picture, "The Daughter of the Gods," were staged.

On the other side, at the extremity of the long strip of palm-fringed sand which encloses the harbour, lie the remains of the old town of Port Royal, once the wealthiest (and also the wickedest) city of the West Indies, in the days when the buccaneers brought their spoils to barter in its marts. Later on, Horatio Nelson used to pace the walls of its forts as he kept his untiring vigil on the lookout for the French fleet.

But we were not bent on historic memories that morning; our desires were keenly set on catching the wily tarpon. The weather was threatening, for the rainy season was at hand, and way down in the south-east, banks of heavy clouds were piling up on the ocean.

Our *modus operandi* was the same as before.

As we watched and waited, a great troop-ship made her stately passage through the entrance of the harbour, and slowly pursued her way up the tortuous "ship channel," disturbing the sea-fowl which rose with raucous cries from their perches on the cross-arms of the stakes marking the channel. She came to carry the dusky sons of Empire who were faring forth to fight their country's battles.

A huge frigate-bird floated high in the air, his piercing eyes keenly scanning the surface of the water. Then, collapsing his great wings suddenly, he dropped like a bomb from an airplane, diving beneath the surface with a splash, and reappearing the next minute with a gleaming fish held crosswise in his formidable beak. Sitting at ease on the water, he gave a couple of jerks and gulps and the fish disappeared in his capacious maw. A few strong strokes from his powerful pinions sent him up into the air again to resume his watch.

Meanwhile, there were no signs of tarpon about, but presently I felt a heavy bite, and struck without result. On reeling in, I found that the good-sized mullet I had put on the hook had been bitten cleanly in half.

"Shark bite dat, massa," said the boatman, inspecting the bait. "Better we move 'noder place. No catch fish if shark deh."

He was paddling us to the other side of the river's mouth, when he called our attention to a

school of porpoises which came racing up from the harbour's entrance, rolling and leaping over each other in their exuberant gambols. They cavorted right up to the mouth of the river, which was evidently a favourite hunting ground, for there followed a great commotion in the water as the smaller fish fled in all directions, pursued by these hunters of the sea. Quite close to the boat a large calipeva (the Jamaica Salmon) sprang high out of the water, followed by a large porpoise which seized the fugitive fish in its jaws as it curved gracefully through the air. In a few minutes, the commotion was over and the squadron, wheeling about, retraced their gambolling journey towards the entrance of the harbour.

On the boatman's advice, we moved away from the scene of disturbance and anchored in deep water before we resumed our quest for the tarpon. There was no sign, however, of the big fish being in the neighbourhood, and after a weary spell of waiting, we had just decided to lift anchor and make for home when the slack of my line began to slip away in the usual stealthy fashion, and I felt the rush of the tarpon as I struck vigorously.

A succession of leaps into the air failed to release him from the hook, but he fought valiantly nevertheless, and our boatman had to manœuvre his dugout skilfully to avoid the rushes of the fish. At one time he almost succeeded in

getting the line beneath the bottom of the boat by an unexpected dart toward us, but we evaded this just in time.

However, his rushes gradually grew shorter and weaker and I was able to apply pressure and bring him alongside, when again I almost lost my fish through misadventure.

The boatman handled the gaff, and as he plunged the steel hook into the side of the tarpon and raised it from the water the wooden handle came right away from the hook and the fish fell back with a heavy splash. I uttered a cry of dismay, but my valiant henchman was equal to the occasion. Throwing himself halfway into the water, he seized the hook by the shank and hauled the exhausted fish bodily into the boat.

The struggle had lasted just half an hour, timed by my friend's watch, although it had seemed much longer to me and I was very glad that it was all over. The fish was not particularly a big specimen, measuring only five feet long, but he was my first tarpon, and I was pleased to have him, and I showed him around to my friends that day with considerable pride.

CHAPTER IV

MORE MOUNTAIN MULLET

SOME nine miles east of Kingston, the mountain side is split by a deep fissure, and into this gorge the little Cane River plunges with a jubilant roar and pursues a tumultuous journey, leaping and dashing amongst the rocks of the gorge, until it reaches the line of snow-white surf cast on the rocky coast by the unceasing surge of the blue tropic sea.

The torrent shoots out over the crest of the gorge into the depths below like a silver stream rushing from a gigantic hydrant, and the force of the falling water has hollowed out a large basin beneath, in which a cool and refreshing bath is welcomed by the weary traveller after a hot journey under the tropic sun's scorching rays.

Nestling among the rocks, overhanging the fall on the left side of the ravine, is a cave which more than a century ago formed the refuge and abiding-place of one Three-fingered Jack, a fugitive negro slave, who used to terrorise the neighbourhood with his depredations, descending

to the plains from his eyrie and robbing travellers on the coast road. The story goes that a price was put on his head, and this was earned by a maroon (as the original slaves of the Spaniards were termed), who brought in the deformed hand of the robber as evidence of his success.

The fall is now a popular resort for picnic parties, but it is hard work in the tropic sun for ladies to climb the foot-track which runs up the rocky sides of the gorge, some three miles from the main road, especially as it is necessary to cross the stream no fewer than eleven times on the way up.

Some time ago I arranged to take a party to the spot, and it appeared to me, after a careful study of the road map, that it would be possible to avoid the hike up the gorge by turning off the coast road into a branch "parochial road," which was shown on the map as winding up into the interior around the head of the ravine. On reaching the road, however, we found that it looked like nothing but the sandy and boulder-strewn bed of a river course, or "gully" as it is called locally, which like most tropical streams is quite dry during times of drought, but becomes a boiling torrent during the rainy season.

Well, there we were, and we had either to go on or turn back, and so we decided to go on and brave the dangers of the journey. I was driving a Buick five-seater, and my passengers included three members of the fair sex, and it

was therefore necessary to proceed with caution amongst the rocks and boulders which strewed the bed of the river ; but in any case it was slow going, for the wheels could not travel fast in the sandy soil. After progressing awhile, there came a slight ascent in the river bed, and trickles of water appeared and shallow pools showed here and there, and we observed with relief that there actually seemed to be something like a road climbing up the left bank of the "gully," but our joy changed to lamentation when we proceeded to sample the said road and began to suffer a succession of frightful jars and jolts as the car bumped heavily up the rocky ascent, which grew steeper at each turn, until finally we were confronted by a torrent some twenty feet wide rushing across our path.

At first sight it seemed impassable, but close inspection showed that it was only about two feet deep, so I made a dash across. Unfortunately, at a critical point the off rear wheel jammed firmly between two boulders and the car remained immovable in mid-stream with the water washing over the foot-boards.

Of course, the ladies started to scream, but we got them dry shod to the farther bank. We could, however, not budge the car, and we were glad when reinforcements showed up in the distance in the shape of a good-humoured-looking native who appeared from up the road, accompanied by two or three young lads,

evidently his sons. They procured us a couple of poles with which we were able to dislodge the boulders, and then we pushed the car through.

"Does this road take us to the Cane River Falls?" I asked.

"Yes, Massa. It tek yo' right troo, sah, but it is well rough, sah! Yo' can't dribe arl de way. Yo' mus' leave yo' cyar an' walk to de head ob de Falling."

"How far is it?"

"Not too far, Massa."

"Just how far?"

"Far enough, sah!"

"Oh, for goodness' sake, man! Is it a mile?"

"Maybe a mile, Massa."

"Is it half a mile?"

"P'raps 'bout a half-mile, sah! May be twenty chain, Massa."

Eventually we found it to be about a third of a mile farther; but we were obliged to park the car a little way up the road and climb the rest of the journey. We were well repaid, however, when we reached the top, and leaning over the rocks which crowned the summit, looked down on the big silver jet thundering down into the narrow depths beneath from which a perpetual cloud of silvery spray ascended. The air around the fall felt delightfully cool and moist after our hot drive, and with the assistance of our friendly native we made haste to find our way down into

the ravine, following a precipitous foot-track which zig-zagged steeply down the left side of the gorge. But first we explored Three-fingered Jack's cave, and gazed from its porthole on a wide stretch of coastline, with the blue sea foaming white-edged on the dazzling beaches. Towards the ocean the plain undulated in stretches of thicket, alternating with green savannahs and dark patches of cultivated land, with a white ribbon of road creeping along the sea margin.

At last we climbed down over the big rocks surrounding the pool beneath the Fall, and watched the tons of silvery water falling with a perpetual clamour.

I had brought a light fishing rod with me, and our guide, observing this, remarked, pointing to the pool :—

“ Plenty mullet in dere, Massa.”

I doubted whether fish could live directly under such a force of falling water, and accordingly replied :—

“ Nonsense, man !”

“ True, Massa, true,” he repeated earnestly. “ Mullet in dere, sah.”

“ How do you know ?”

“ Me catch one, Massa. Him weigh two pounds.”

I laughed incredulously. “ How did you catch him ?”

“ Me lay down in de wahtah, sah, an' ah keep

puffickly quiet, sah, an' when he come ah hold him by him gill, sah !"

This seemed too preposterous ; although I had read of trout-tickling in the Old Country, it seemed incredible that my sable friend could have performed a similar feat in such turbulent water as was now before me. However, it was easy to test his assertions as to fish being there, and quickly picking up my light rod, and baiting the hook with a morsel of *avocado* pear, I began to search out the recesses of the pool swirling around the rocks underneath the Fall.

The bait had hardly disappeared when I felt a severe tug, and the next moment I was playing a lively fish which rushed vigorously around the pool. He weighed just a pound when I netted him. He was a nice mountain mullet.

My guide was delighted. "What I tell yo', sah ! What I tell yo' !" he observed, grinning hugely.

In the course of the next twenty minutes I landed eleven or twelve fair-sized mullet, when they stopped biting, and then we began *our* biting, for we promptly made a fire over which we broiled the fish and had them for lunch. They were delicious ! I wish I had some now.

Later on we had a delightful bath in the pool, and then, after rewarding our good guide, we made a safe journey homewards by a less hazardous route.

Mountain mullet, however, cannot always be

depended upon to take the bait of the luscious *avocado* (vegetable) pear. In some parts of the island the pear tree is scarce, and the fish is unfamiliar with the bait. I remember once visiting a banana plantation on the hills of St. Mary with a week-end party, who were out for a good time. We played bridge late the first night, and most of the party were in bed when I got up early the next morning and rode down the hillside to the stream which bubbled peacefully in the valley through the rustling green rows of broad-leaved banana trees. A small boy took my horse, while another guided me to the deeper pools of the little stream.

I was using pear for bait, with a small sinker fastened on the gut leader about eighteen inches above the hook. Standing well away from the bank, I fished carefully through several pools, but failed to get any bites, although now and again I saw flashes of the silvery sides of the fish as they darted about, apparently suspicious of the bait.

"Try dem wid *jonga*, sah. Dat bait no good," advised my small guide.

I adopted his suggestion, and he quickly caught some crayfish from under the stones. These proved immediately successful, and in due course I managed to collect a string of nine fair-sized mullet.

By this time the sun was getting very hot, and an inward emptiness reminded me that it

was past breakfast time, so I returned to the house on the top of the hill, where I found the party gathered on the veranda awaiting my return.

"How many fish did you catch?" they inquired anxiously.

"Nine," I announced, and was surprised to see disappointment reflected in their faces.

"You lucky beggar," said one, "you've won the sweep yourself."

I then heard that during my absence they had arranged a half-crown lottery on my probable catch, and that they had taken a chance for me, with the result that I had drawn the lucky number—"Nine!"

CHAPTER V

FISH AND " FISH-POTS "

STARTING from Kingston, on the south side and traversing the mountain range, in the course of which the train passes through no fewer than twenty-one tunnels, one branch of the Jamaica railway emerges on the north-eastern coast of the island and runs eastward along the seashore for many miles.

In some places the line is almost washed by the blue Caribbean as it surges up the sunlit beaches, but at other parts the track is carried high on substantial bridges over the wide mouths of tropical rivers, which, peaceful-looking in normal times, become formidable torrents during the rainy seasons.

In my journeys through the island visiting, on behalf of the Government, the plantations where East Indian labourers were employed, I used to seize every opportunity of practising the "gentle art" whenever time and place permitted.

One of my favourite resorts was the waters of the Spanish River, which flowed through a banana and cocoa property owned by a friend. He lived in a little shanty which had been run

up just above the railway bridge by the engineers of the line at the time when they were constructing the track. As my friend spent more of his time on the property than at his town residence, he had adapted the building to suit his requirements, and I used to stay with him there on my visits to the district.

It was a precarious sort of dwelling-place, perched as it was on the extreme verge of a forty-foot cliff, the base of which was being steadily scoured out by the turbulent river notwithstanding the efforts of the Public Works officials to divert the current. After every flood large slices of the bank fell away into the stream.

At the time of the great earthquake of Jan. 14, 1907, which wrecked the city of Kingston, my friend rushed out of the building to find his verandah only a few feet from the edge of the cliff, while a little higher up the bank his chicken-house was actually half over the brink and had to be removed.

Way up the river on the opposite shore the rapids course furiously, swirling across to the high bank under the house and sliding thence into deep blue pools under the railway bridge. This bridge was used also for road traffic, and from it one could look down and see the depths below simply teeming with fish, but being so near the public highway they were exceedingly shy and difficult to catch.

During the heat of the day rows of great snook could be seen lying in the cool shade of the pool with their noses up-stream, almost motionless except for an occasional flicker of the tail. It was almost impossible to induce them to accept bait, and the only time when one had a chance of catching them was in the cool of the dawn or at night when they went up into the rapids in search of crayfish.

I grieve to say that it was my friend's reprehensible practice to shoot them from the bridge whenever they gave him the chance by coming to the surface. He said he shot for the pot and had no inclination for the tedious sport of the rod, as it always had barren results for him !

A laughable incident occurred one morning just after I had completed my inspection of the coolies who were mustered on the river-bank in front of the verandah where I was sitting. The coloured headman in charge of them who had been peering into the pool beneath the bridge, exclaimed excitedly : " Busha ! Busha !* Ah beg yo' lend me yo' gun, quick, sah ! Ah see a big snook lie 'pon de top ob de watah."

Armed with a rifle, a Winchester repeater, he fired a couple of shots in quick succession, and there was a flurry on the surface of the pool, but the fish remained on the top swimming about in one place. " You missed him," said my friend. " Give me the gun !" " No, Busha ! No, sah ;

* Native term for " Overseer."

ah don' miss him, sah ! See him lay 'pon de top. Ah hit him, sah ! Ah hit him !"

The " busha " came to the brink and looked down the bank. " Why, he is on my line," he exclaimed grinning. " I put down a night line here yesterday evening."

Stooping, he detached the end of the line from amongst the growth on the edge, and with the help of the headman a large snook was hauled up the bank much to the gratification of the coolies. The headman was mortified, however, to find that the fish had escaped unscathed from his shots.

The favourite food of these predaceous fish are the crayfish which infest the rocks in the rapids. The natives were very clever in catching these miniature freshwater lobsters—which they called " jonga "—with their bare hands, skilfully snatching the elusive creatures from the under-side of the stones in the swiftest current, but my own efforts usually resulted fruitlessly with a nip of the fingers from the claws of the crayfish. However, there were always lots of boys about willing to furnish me with a canful for a few pence. One particular species of this " jonga " with red stripes across its back was popularly considered to be irresistible by the snook. The natives called it " Tom-Brim."

I remember one morning catching a good-sized snook under somewhat ludicrous circum-

stances. In a pool just around the bend of the river above the house, my friend was accustomed to take an early morning plunge. I accompanied him this particular morning carrying a couple of rods. One I fastened down with a heavy stone near the rapids and flung the line into a foaming pool below with a heavy sinker on, the hook baited with a lively " Tom-Brim."

Requesting my friend to keep an eye on the rod while he was taking his bath, I went round the corner intending to try for a mountain mullet in some of the upper reaches, but I had not gone very far before I heard shouts, and running back to the bend I saw my friend destitute of all clothing stumbling about the rocks in the shallows holding the rod, the top joint of which was bending almost double under the rushes of a heavy fish in the pool below. He presented a most comical appearance as he gingerly trod on the stones " naked but unashamed," with his grey whiskers floating in the breeze. He did not appreciate my merriment, however, but yelled for me to come and take the rod, which I did and brought to net a nice four-pound snook.

The snook are very fond of a little big-headed black fish which infests the more stagnant pools, boring and lying motionless in the mud at the bottom. They bear various names in different parts of the island. Round the Spanish River they were known as " bullheads," while

elsewhere they were called "godamies," and also "bungo-beans."

They were certainly very deadly bait for snook. One morning, fishing for little more than half-an-hour before breakfast, wading in the rapids and swimming the live-bait down under the railway bridge, I caught in rapid succession no less than seven young snook varying in weight from one and three-quarters to three pounds. There are few dishes more tasty than a young snook stewed with seasoning and "country peppers" in the true West Indian fashion.

The pools of the Spanish River way up in the mountains used to be full of the famous hog-nosed mullet which is one of the delicacies of the island, but nowadays the wily native has become familiar with the use of dynamite in the road-blasting operations which are constantly going on, and, notwithstanding the watchfulness of the country police, the darkies have spoiled the fishing in many of the remoter parts of the rivers. Whenever they are able to annex a dynamite cartridge, it is exploded in the pools and a rich harvest is reaped.

In former times the natives used to dope the fish by using the juice of a noxious plant. They would dam up the pool, and crushing the branches of the poisonous weed throw them into the water, when after a while the fish would float half-stupefied to the surface, and be easily

captured. But dynamiting is less trouble, although illegal and a dangerous method. I often saw men who had lost the lower part of their arms through careless handling of the explosive.

I remember one evening, after an almost fruitless day's fishing, a party of us were rowing home down a river in another part of the island, when we observed a line of fish-pots beneath the surface just opposite to a cluster of native huts on the bank. These so-called pots are funnel-shaped basket affairs made of interwoven strips of bamboo, so arranged that the fish enters by the mouth of the funnel, and is unable to return. We called out to some men who were sitting in front of the huts watching us, but they denied all knowledge of the pots, saying :—" Dey don't belong to we, massa. Dey belong to an ole African who lib up in de bush."

One of us, however, sharper-eyed than the rest, detected the tail of a fish protruding from beneath a heap of banana trash on the bank, and we thereupon peremptorily ordered the trash to be cleared away, when a goodly pile was disclosed, much to the chagrin of us fishermen who had been toiling all day with small success.

We lectured them severely, pointing out the enormity of their offence against the law, which, we said, could only be condoned by their consenting to sell us some of the fish at reasonable prices.

This was arranged, and the boat being brought alongside the bank the fish were dropped into our outstretched hands, so that when we got home we could say with clear consciences that we had caught them.

I do not attempt to defend the morality of this transaction, but, as some of my readers are perhaps aware, the morals of a fisherman at the close of a blank day are far from scrupulous.

CHAPTER VI

A SHARK STORY

THE following fish story is probably the most extraordinary ever told, and moreover, unlike most fishing yarns, it is absolutely authenticated and vouched for by the official records and documents of the time.

The facts are, that on the 28th day of August, in the year of grace, 1799, His Britannic Majesty's ship of war, the cutter *Sparrow*, commanded by Captain Hugh Wylie, being stationed in West Indian waters, was cruising in the Caribbean Sea off the south coast of the Island of Hayti, and England being at that time at war with most of the powers in the New World, the British tars were naturally keeping their eyes skinned, on the look-out for whatever booty Dame Fortune might think fit to put in their way, and when a strange craft was sighted in the offing, all sail was pressed on and the vessel was soon overhauled and boarded.

The skipper of the captured vessel, whose name was Thomas Briggs, produced papers purporting to show that she was the brig *Nancy*

of British nationality, but the English officers, stubborn after the manner of their kind, and convinced from the brig's build that she was an American ship, decided to take her as a prize into Port Royal in the neighbouring Island of Jamaica. This was done notwithstanding the master's protests, and in due course suit was instituted in the Court of Vice-Admiralty at Kingston, Jamaica, seeking a decision that the *Nancy* was a lawful prize seized on the high seas, as the property of persons being enemies of the realm.

The suit was contested, and it is not likely that the claim for condemnation of the vessel would have succeeded had it not been that at the critical moment of the action certain papers of an incriminating nature were produced by another British Naval Officer, Lieutenant Fitton, who made oath and swore that he had found them inside the stomach of a shark which he had caught while cruising off San Domingo in the tender of His Majesty's ship *Abergavenny*.

These papers proved that the *Nancy* had sailed from Baltimore some time previously, and that she was owned by Germans who had become naturalized citizens of the United States. Three years before that she had been captured by a French privateer and carried into the port of Guadeloupe, where she was condemned as American property. The production of these papers in the Jamaica Court of course at once proved the case for the British Officers and the

Nancy was accordingly condemned as a lawful prize. The following is an exact copy of the affidavit :—

Jamaica, SS.

IN THE COURT OF VICE ADMIRALTY.

The Adv. Gen. ex ret. Wylie, et all.

vs.

The Brig *Nancy*.

“ Michael Fitton, Esquire, being duly sworn, maketh oath and saith that the tender of His Majesty’s ship of war *Abergavenny*, then under the command of this deponent, being on a cruise off Jacmel in the island of San Domingo, on the thirteenth day of August last, discovered a dead bullock surrounded by sharks, which he had towed alongside the said tender for the purpose of catching the said sharks, and this deponent saith that having caught one of the said sharks and hoisted it on board the said tender, he ordered some of the seamen to separate its jaws and clean them, as the said shark was larger than common, which the said seamen did, whilst others opened its maw, and therein discovered in the presence of this deponent a parcel of papers tied up with a string. And this deponent saith that on perusing the said paper he discovered a letter of a recent date from Curricoa, and as it occurred to this deponent they might relate to some vessel detained by some of His

Majesty's cruisers, he had them dried on deck ; and this deponent saith that having been informed that His Majesty's cutter *Sparrow* has sent down to this island as prize a certain brig, a vessel called the *Nancy*, and supposing the papers so found as aforesaid might be useful at the trial of the said vessel called the *Nancy*, hath caused the same to be sealed up, and delivered them to one of the surrogates of this honorable court without any fraud, alteration, addition, subduction, or embezzlement whatsoever."

MICHAEL FITTON.

Taken and the truth thereof sworn to before me this 24th say of September, 1799.

J. FRASER, *Surrogate*.

These papers were delivered to me by Lieutenant Fitton at the time of his swearing to his affidavit in the cause, Adv. Genl. Wylie, et all., *vs*, the brig *Nancy*.

(Signed) J. FRASER, *Surrogate*.
24th September, 1799.

It is surely impossible to surpass so extraordinary a coincidence as the foregoing. The original packet of papers together with Lieutenant Fitton's affidavit are kept in a glass case in the Institute of Jamaica, where they may be seen by visitors to Kingston. The head of the shark is in the United Service Museum in London.

CHAPTER VII

SOME BIG FISH

ON the north-eastern coast of Jamaica, at the foot of the famous Blue Mountains, lies the picturesque little town of Port Antonio, perched on a promontory whose shores are washed by the waters of the blue Caribbean Sea. Surrounded by banana groves, here are the headquarters of the United Fruit Company, whose steamers are constantly moving in and out of the harbour carrying fruit to the northern markets.

The waters along the coast abound in fish, and whenever I visited the town on my travels and could spare the time, I used to hire a native canoe and troll around with my sea-rod in the hope of catching a big fellow.

I was trolling for barracouta one afternoon, using a brass-wire trace, for the formidable jaws of this savage fish have no difficulty in cutting through an ordinary gimp leader. The bait employed was a narrow strip of mullet, cut by the boatman so that two-forked tails trailed quivering behind.

The western harbour of Port Antonio is almost completely land-locked by Navy Island

which lies a cable's length from the promontory. We trolled across the harbour, up and down inside the island without result. Finally, the boatman said : " Make we go outside the reef, Massa."

I agreed to his proposal, and he rowed around the island into deep water. The waves were somewhat choppy as we skirted the rocks, and the canoe seemed a very frail craft to me ; but as we got farther out the surface smoothed into an undulating swell, and I felt more comfortable.

Well, we continued to troll up and down and to and fro, skirting the reef, but with no success, and finally I concluded that I was out of luck and might as well go home.

I started to reel up my line, and had brought the lure within ten yards of the boat when there sounded a splash like a small hippopotamus, and an enormous (there is no other word for it—to my startled eyes it looked as big as a horse !) blue jack flung himself almost out of the water as he seized the bait.

" Hold him, Massa ! Hold him !" yelled the boatman frantically.

I confess frankly that I lost my head, I was astounded at the size of the fish, and in my nervousness I applied undue pressure with the rod, and the giant fish simply made a huge wallow and smashed the line without apparent effort, leaving me breathless with disappointment and excitement, while the boatman volubly voiced

his lamentations, as we returned homewards, disconsolate and empty-handed.

About six miles from Port Antonio, on the eastern coast, is situated one of the beauty spots of the neighbourhood, known as the Blue Hole. This is an inlet of the sea almost completely shut in by overhanging coco-palms, banana trees, and a tangle of dense tropical growth. Standing on the bluff overhanging the cove, you can look down into the blue depths of the water and at times see far below the dim shapes of large tarpon moving silently around. The sight is tantalising to the angler, as the fish absolutely refuse to be tempted by bait in any shape.

I often tried, without success, although I used to catch barracouta trolling near the rocks on the edges of the cove. The inlet forms an ideal shelter for small vessels, and must have witnessed many a piratical rendezvous in the old buccaneering days.

Trolling near its mouth, one afternoon, I caught two barracouta in quick succession, but lost a third, a much larger fish (of course !), which bit clean through the stout brass wire.

The fishermen say that this savage fish (which does not hesitate to attack the unwary bather) nibbles the copper sheathing on the bottom of vessels, and they claim that this explains the cases of poisoning which sometimes occur when its flesh is eaten, but it is more probable that the fish is inedible at certain seasons.

To the west of Port Antonio the Rio Grande flows into the ocean. This is the second largest river in the island, but its waters are not navigable, as it courses swiftly from the Blue Mountains. Shooting the rapids on bamboo rafts is one of the sports enjoyed by visitors.

I have caught many a fish while wading thigh-deep in the rapids. Mullet, drummer, and snook frequent its waters, to say nothing of large tarpon, which come up from the sea at times.

A friend of mine, who was not guiltless of drawing the long-bow, told me that he once caught in the Rio Grande a tarpon weighing 108lb., which took him two hours to land. Later on, in the evening, however, growing expansive with the wine, he confessed that he got so sore handling the rod that he had enlisted the assistance of his servant boy, who administered the *coup-de-grace* to the fish with a shotgun!

I see no reason to doubt his statement as to the weight of the fish, however, for I myself saw a 106-pounder, which another friend caught in a creek on the south side of the island, and shortly after I left the Colony I read an account in the local newspapers of the capture in a net, by a native fisherman, of a tarpon weighing no less than 140lb. The fish tore the net badly in its struggles, but finally exhausted itself and was dragged ashore. This last would have been



BLUE HOLE, PORT ANTONIO

a tough customer to handle with a rod and lure, I imagine !

I once went with a friend to the mouth of the Plantain Garden River, on the extreme eastern point of the island, to catch tarpon. For two days we sat in the boat and watched the huge fish breaking the surface of the water on all sides, but they took no notice whatever of the tempting morsels of mullet which we offered to them.

At the outset my friend remarked : " Well, I never expect to get a bite until I have had a go of bug-juice ! "

The bug-juice proved to be a bottle of prime old Jamaica rum, but although we sampled it judiciously there was no improvement in our luck. This is one of the drawbacks of tarpon-fishing. Unless the fish are on the feed (and there is no knowing when they are) it is a waste of time to persist in trying to attract them, and you may as well go home.

The method of procedure is to select a likely baiting-ground, and having anchored your boat, the mullet bait is cut into small pieces and distributed in handful all around the boat. Finally, you thread your hook (we used a leader of Punjab steel wire) through a large piece of mullet, and cast your line unweighted as far from the boat as possible, and let the bait sink silently into the depths.

Then coiling six feet or so of slack at the bottom of the boat, you sit down in patience to

wait. If fortune rewards you later on, you will see the slack line quietly slipping over the side of the boat, and as soon as it has gone you strike heavily (holding the butt with both hands) so as to drive the point of the hook well into the bony structure of the mouth, and then the fun begins. The big fish hurls his gleaming, silver body curving into the air, shaking his head like a terrier in the effort to get rid of the hook, and nine times out of ten he does so, but if unsuccessful he is nothing daunted and continues his leaps throughout his struggles for freedom.

There is no gamer fish in the sea, and when you finally bring him alongside to the gaff you feel that you have thoroughly earned your victory.

Sharks are sometimes a great nuisance, seizing the bait and breaking the line. Occasionally these pests of the sea become bolder, and members of the tiger-shark family (ocean denizens usually) have been known to enter the harbours and attack bathers. Some years ago, while bathing waist-deep on the shores of Kingston Harbour, a young girl had her leg bitten off at the thigh with fatal results. Two monsters were captured by means of floating bait. Five oil-drums were baited with two carcasses of dogs and three 5-lb. snappers attached by chain-hooks, and the whole contrivance was then tethered to the pier by a long hawser.

The sharks swallowed the bait during the night, and in the morning were so exhausted by

their struggles that they were easily drawn ashore and despatched.

One measured nine feet and the other over twelve. In the stomach of the latter no fewer than nineteen young ones were found. They were specimens of the striped tiger-shark (*stegostoma tigrinum*), which is viviparous in producing its young.

CHAPTER VIII

A LOST ROD

THE dry plains of the district of St. Catherine, Jamaica, have been converted by the magic touch of refreshing water into green fields of rustling sugar-cane and shady groves of broad-leaved banana trees.

The current of the Rio Cobre has been dammed as the river issues from the mountains, and many miles of canals carry the precious water over the plain, distributing it far and wide by means of a series of locks and sluice-gates.

The main canals are teeming with mountain mullet and rock-fish, and I have spent many a pleasant time with my rod wandering along the banks under the shade of the mango-trees, picking out a fish here and there.

The canals pass through the ancient capital of Spanish Town, running parallel with the railway line in places, and, surprising as it may seem, I have made some of my best catches within the precincts of the railway yard, fishing in the rushing water under the overfall of the sluices.

It was really astonishing what sizeable fish could be taken in such a moderate body of water. The canal was little more than ten yards broad in most places, with an average depth of four or five feet.

I remember one occasion when I arrived with a friend. We had hardly started fishing in the station-yard when he caught under the lower fall a rock-fish weighing no less than 4lb. He caught it with a small crayfish (locally known as "jonga").

The one drawback to the fishing was that you would sometimes arrive by train from Kingston and find that, although the sky was bright and sunny, the water in the canals was the colour of thick pea-soup, owing to the rains in the distant mountains having brought the river down. In such a case it was almost useless to fish, as the mullet will not take in muddy water, although I have sometimes made nice catches when the water was clearing.

Just outside the town the water irrigates a large vegetable farm, which is cultivated by the inmates of the district prison. As a Government officer I enjoyed the privilege of fishing through the farm, and I frequently made good catches there, for the fish, of course, were not quite so shy as in the public canals.

One morning I took my small son with me, as a treat for him, if not for me, and although he did not make much use of the extra rod I had

brought for him, he certainly seemed to enjoy himself thoroughly. His chief idea of pleasure was to wait until my back was turned, and then send a long bamboo whirling over the fall right on to the pool where I was fishing ; while his stone-throwing surpasses description. The irrigation By-Laws strictly forbade bathing in the canal, but I found it hard work to resist his ceaseless importunities to be allowed to have a dip.

We made our way down the banks of the canal through the Prison Farm, and on the way, despite the attentions of my small boy, I managed to collect a bunch of mullet, while my son had a good time with the two young natives who were carrying our outfit. My bag became full, and as the rays of the tropic sun were growing unduly warm I deemed it advisable to put my catch in the shade, so I wrapped them inside a banana leaf with some wet grass and *cached* them inside the spreading roots of a coconut palm.

My youngster got tired of carrying his rod from place to place, so he flung the baited hook into the water, and weighing down the butt with a large stone, he left it in charge of one of the young natives. Then we continued our way down the stream until we reached the place where the canal was carried under the river through a large iron tube, the water being pumped up on the opposite higher bank by means of a syphon.

Here there was a large pool swirling under a canopy of arching coconut palms. This was one of my favourite fishing places, and I soon secured some sizeable fish. Then after we had disposed of our sandwiches, washed down with cool, refreshing water, sipped from the juicy green coconuts, we retraced our steps along the banks of the canal.

The first thing that caught my eye on the return journey was a flock of ungainly, black, red-headed turkey buzzards, clustered beneath a coco-palm. These birds are invaluable as scavengers of garbage and carrion, but they are most repulsive-looking in appearance, with their cruel, glittering eye, curved beak and scarlet cranium, which presents the appearance of having been scalded to a red-raw condition. The peasants tell a folk-lore story of how the original "John Crow" (as they call the bird) lost its head-feathers by greedily thrusting his *caput* into a pot of boiling food.

Like all vultures, they have the wonderful faculty of scenting offal miles away, and it is marvellous to see how quickly they gather around the carcass, wheeling down in circles from all quarters of the blue sky. Another yarn of the natives is that these birds will not venture to touch the carrion until one of their number, known as "The Parson," first has his taste and announces the meal as *served*!

As we approached the tree the birds shuffled

away quickly on their short, ungainly legs until they gathered momentum, when, with a few heavy flaps of their powerful wings, they rose into the air and soared gracefully into the blazing blue vault of the sky.

On inspection, we found that they had demolished the goodly pile of fish I had hidden within the roots of the coco-palm. Only a few miserable eyeless skulls and bones were left to tell the grisly story !

But this is not all the tale of our misfortunes, for on reaching the place where we had left the rod we could find no trace of either rod or custodian. A droning sound in the vicinity soon revealed the whereabouts of the latter, however. He was discovered flat on his back, with his capacious mouth wide open, lying in the shade of the mango-tree enjoying a rest from his arduous labours. A few judiciously applied "remonstrances" brought him leaping to his feet, but he disclaimed all knowledge of the whereabouts of the rod.

"Ah don't trubble de fish-pole," he said sullenly.

"You little beast," I remarked, shaking him gently but firmly, "I left you to watch the rod. Where is it?"

"Ah don't know, sah. Ah don' trubble it."

"Now, look here, my lad," I said ; "I believe you've hidden that rod somewhere. You go and

find it in quick time, or you'll get something you won't like. Look sharp now."

He began to blubber. "Please, Massa, Ah don' tief da pole. Fish mus' ah draw it into de wahtah."

Here was my son's opportunity. "Oh, Daddy, let me go in. Do, Daddy! I will get it out. Do let me."

Well, if the young blackamoor had not erred from the path of truth, it was possible that the rod *might* be in the canal unless a passer-by had annexed it while its erstwhile guardian snored.

My son saw signs of yielding in my face, and in a trice he had his clothes off and was playing about in the water, which was only three or four feet deep just at that part, but he could swim like a fish anyhow, and he dived around, just revelling in the cool water. He could find no rod, however, and then the trouble was to get him out. He kept wading down the stream, ignoring my calls, and just as I was beginning to get angry, and he had proceeded some thirty yards down the canal, he gave a shout :—

"I have got it, Dad!"

And so he had, and, what was more, when he brought the rod to the bank and handed it to me, I felt a fish on the line, and I promptly proceeded to land a nice half-pound mullet.

So young blackie was acquitted and received his *solatium* in due course.

CHAPTER IX

STRANGE MOUNTAIN MISHAPS

ABOUT twenty miles from Kingston, the Jamaica Railway, after traversing for a considerable distance the southern slope of the beautiful valley of the *Rio Cobre* (Copper River), tunnels the mountain and emerges at the little village of Bog Walk.

For some time after the construction of the line, so unstable was the soil of the precipitous hillside that the heavy tropical rains frequently brought down rocks and earth to block the single line of track which skirts the ravine some hundred feet above the torrent gurgling in the misty depths below.

I remember on one occasion, after a heavy rainfall, as the train passed through the tunnel we felt a terrible jarring, jolting and bumping as the brakes were suddenly applied. This was followed by a tremendous shock, and our carriage remained standing still in the darkness of the tunnel. Much alarmed, we waited in suspense, but nothing further happening, I jumped out and walked along, to find the fore-



BOG WALK GORGE

most part of the train emerged from the tunnel with the front wheels of the engine projecting over the edge of the precipice side of the track and an enormous boulder (it was estimated at four tons in weight) blocking the way. The vibration caused by the train had evidently loosened the hold of the boulder on the hillside, and the engine driver saw the huge rock bounding down the mountain as he drew out of the mouth of the tunnel. Keeping his head, he applied the brakes hard and stopped the train in time to prevent the rock striking the engine broadside. On the contrary the engine struck the boulder and pushed it along for several feet, tearing up the track. Pieces of the "cow-catcher" were found embedded in the rock. If the locomotive had received the full force of the downfall it would certainly have been knocked off the track down the precipice, and no doubt all the coaches would have followed suit.

Mountain mullet abound in the swirling eddies beneath the falls of the stream, and in the deeper pools which scour out recesses in the overhanging mountainside. I have taken many sizeable fish, wading down the torrent, equipped with a 6oz. rod, a fine trout cast, and a No. 6 hook baited with morsels of vegetable-pear.

One day I left the train at Bog Walk Station and pushed my way through the chattering mob of natives who thronged the neighbourhood as

customary, offering for sale their baskets of luscious fruits and vegetables, including ruddy mangoes, golden oranges, bananas, and green-skinned plantains. By the way, the name "Bog Walk" is the result of the distortion in native dialect of the original Spanish name *Boca Agua* (Watersmouth). Purchasing a couple of large pears, I crossed the railway-bridge over the torrent and walked down to the Electric Company's head works. There the dynamos develop the power which is transmitted along twenty miles of cable to the distant city of Kingston. The pipe which conducts the water from the intake dam to the power-house is over a mile in length, and no less than eight feet in diameter.

A fearsome tragedy was enacted here one day. Although the mouth of the intake is finely screened, it is found necessary to employ gangs of labourers from time to time to enter the huge pipe through the several man-holes and remove from the interior the *débris* of sand and gravel which rapidly accumulates inside.

By some terrible mischance the engineer down at the head works 'phoned up to the dam and had the water turned on while the labourers were still working inside. The dreadful struggle that took place inside the pipe may be better imagined than described. Not many escaped. The frenzied blacks almost tore each other to pieces in their desperate efforts to reach the man-holes. When the water was turned off no

less than thirty-three torn and battered bodies were removed from the pipe. The engineer had to flee the district immediately to escape the wrath of the natives.

The water above the dam is too still to attract the lively mullet, which love to ply about the current and eddies of a swift stream, looking for what is brought down, so I did not waste time by casting my line in the water above the barrier but went on down by the side of the dam, and climbing over the big pipe, waded across the shallows to a bend in the gorge where the torrent foamed round a rocky point, rushing out of the blazing sunlight into the cool, shady recesses of the bulging hillside, from which a clump of creaking bamboos trailed overhanging feathery branches into the swirling eddies of the pool. As the current was very rapid I put on a fairly heavy sinker about 18in. up the cast, and cut up my *avocado* pears into small morsels suitable for the hook, but unfortunately the fruit was a little too ripe and the swift stream shortly dissolved the bait each time I made my cast. Occasionally I felt a suspicion of a slight lightning-like pluck, pluck, at the bait, but although I struck instantly, each time the hook came back stripped, much to my chagrin. After repeated fruitless attempts I put down my rod and started to try and catch some of the little *crustaceans*, called "jonga" by the natives, a species of tiny lobsters, which frequent the

pools, clinging to the underside of the stones. With some difficulty I at last captured a lovely, transparent little fellow, and carefully threading my hook into his tail, I cast him struggling into the depths of the pool. Splash! He had hardly sunk beneath the surface when the glistening dark-grey back of a huge mullet flashed into view, and I felt a terrific tug on the slender cast. To avoid disaster I had to let him run, and his first proceeding was to dash head-long up-stream into the foaming rapids, where, however, I managed to check him and turn him down again. There followed a succession of frantic rushes and incessant tugging, which gradually got weaker as I kept on a steady strain, and finally I drew him gasping up the shelving side of the rock.

The spring-balance showed his weight as $1\frac{3}{4}$ lb. This was the largest mountain mullet I had caught in Jamaica up to that time. The average fish is about $\frac{1}{2}$ lb. or $\frac{3}{4}$ lb.; anything above a pound is exceptional. I have since caught two or three fish just over $1\frac{3}{4}$ lb., but have never seen anything bigger, although I have *heard* of a reputed three-pounder which attained that size as a captive in a small reservoir. I did not get another fish in that place, but, content with my success, I leisurely waded down to some of the quieter pools, where I was able to make use of the pears, and picked out some smaller fish to supplement my basket. After a light lunch I

made my way on to the head works, where I had often taken nice fish in the deep, bubbling pools below the outlets of the vast pipes. Four huge cowed pipes sink deep below the surface, returning to the river the roaring, eddying water after it has fulfilled its mission inside the machine-house, where the great dynamos hum and vibrate with pulsating energy, but still the rushing water keeps its strength and vigour and speeds onward down the gorge, ever ready to yield similar service on its downward path !

A curious, almost a fatal, accident occurred at these head works one day. I had already heard about it, but, strangely enough, I happened to meet, on the day I am now writing about, one of the chief actors, if not the principal, in the peculiar happening. I may first remark that all the big pipes do not discharge at the same time. An angling enthusiast of the fair sex, who was with a small picnic party visiting the head works, lost her footing on the parapet adjoining the pipes and fell into the swirling water amidst the alarmed cries of her companions, who became terror-stricken when she failed to make a reappearance, although her hat emerged and floated down-stream.

The men dived repeatedly into the pool without success, including an elderly darky who was a wonderful swimmer, and who entered the water in a state of *puris naturalibus*. One of the men of the party told me that the old

African presented a wonderful appearance climbing out of the water with the missing lady's headgear perched jauntily on his head.

This was the hoary-headed gentleman of sable hue who now appeared before me and kindly enlisted the service of two young blackamoors to catch some *jongas* for me, meanwhile discoursing loquaciously.

He narrated vivaciously the details of the occurrence. "Young massa! Ah swim up de ribba and Ah swim down de ribba, and Ah dive deep, but Ah don' see nuttin'. And Ah tink to meself, Hi! How come so? Dis sholy surprising! Ah den, Massa, Ah beg you belieb me, for it raly true, sah! Ah see de young lady foot 'tick out o' de pipe bottom deep down into de hole. So Ah draw him out, sah, and Ah carry him safe to the ribba-bank. And de Missis Queen, young Massa, de good Queen, she send me a paper to say me brave man for save de young lady life. Wait little, Massa, Ah gwine show you." And he trotted off to his little cabin on the hill-side, presently returning with a framed vellum certificate from the Royal Humane Society of England testifying that the certificate had been granted to him in recognition of his bravery in saving life. It was all quite true. The young lady said that when she rose to the surface inside the gloom of the empty pipe she was so bewildered and dazed by the clamour of the falling, roaring waters around her

that she did not realise where she was, and just stayed clinging to the rim of the pipe until rescued. It certainly could not have been an easy task to effect a rescue in the midst of such turbulent, swirling currents, and the old fellow fully deserved his award, of which he was tremendously proud.

I managed to pick out two or three nice mullet from the pools below the pipes, and then, after a refreshing bath in a secluded pool, I sauntered back along the road to the station, where I took the afternoon train back to Kingston.

CHAPTER X

FIRST EXPERIENCES IN CANADIAN WATERS

WHEN I came to Canada after a prolonged residence in the West Indies, I looked forward to enjoying fully the sport of angling in Canadian lakes and rivers, which I had been led to understand were bountifully stocked with an abundance of guileless fish, eagerly desirous of swallowing the fisherman's bait, and longing for a resting place in his creel; and this appealed strongly to me after years of arduous wading of tropic streams under a blazing sun, especially as I do not profess to be a highly expert performer in the art of "gentle" Izaak Walton.

But, alas, my anticipations have so far not been realized, for I have found the finny denizens of Canadian waters just as wary and as reluctant to be caught as those in other parts of the world. It is true that my experiences have up to now been confined to the country around Montreal, where I am a resident, and the waters near the city are of course over-run with fishermen of all kinds and creeds.

My first experience was at Chambly Basin on

the Richelieu River, where, I was informed, black bass were to be caught. I started alone on the trip, but scraped acquaintance on the electric train with two French-Canadians, who informed me that they were going to fish in the Basin, and would "show me the ropes." Eventually they offered to share a boat with me. I accepted their offer as heartily, I trust, as it was made, although truth to tell, I was not greatly impressed with their manners or appearance. However, I was out for the experience. But I was, notwithstanding, somewhat startled when their first act as we rowed away from the pier was for each to produce a large square bottle filled with a colourless liquid, known I believe as white whiskey, which they applied to their mouths and imbibed copiously. I declined their offer to participate, and we proceeded on our way. The sun was hot, and frequent recourse was had to the bottles as we progressed and this soon took effect on one of the pair, who taking off his jacket coiled himself up in the bow and snored heavily. His companion winked at me with a smile, and remarked, "He not drink ver' good."

We shortly anchored at a patch of weeds which he assured me was a good place, and throwing in his line with a large worm attached, he proceeded to settle himself comfortably on the bottom of the boat, with his bottle conveniently disposed. This was certainly not

very alluring to me, but I had perforce to follow suit. The basin was thronged with boats of fishermen pursuing similar tactics. The surroundings were pretty enough, but the sun was very hot, and the sport was hardly what one would call thrilling, and certainly not what I had been led to expect in Canadian waters. We caught some perch and sunfish, moving from one patch of weed to another, and exchanging confidences as to results with other fishermen.

The sleeper in due course roused from his slumbers and proceeded to haul into the boat a large *doré*, much to the envy of his companion, who had toiled while the other slept.

An elderly Scotchman fishing nearby, told us that he had been there since dawning and had done "no so badly," exhibiting with pride a good-sized chain of fish made up principally of perch and sunfish, but also including a couple of small pike and a *doré*. We had hardly moved away from his vicinity when a loud wail rent the air. He had fastened his chain loosely to the side of his boat, and it had slid unnoticed to the depths with all his catch.

"I may as well gang my way home, now," remarked Scottie sadly, pulling up his anchor, and rowing disconsolately away.

My companions were much amused at the occurrence, but retribution overtook them an hour later, when on going to add to the number on their string, they too found that their fish had

disappeared, and they vowed with curses never again to use a chain to string their fish on. However, they set to again, and by the time of departure had once more gathered a number of fair-sized fish.

The day passed with indifferent luck, the only break in the harmony occurring when one of my companions discovered after rowing vigorously for some time, that his *confrère* had thoughtlessly omitted to raise the anchor !

It is said that Providence takes care of children and drunken men, and the saying was certainly exemplified on this occasion, for at night-fall we had all we could do in our flat-bottomed craft to reach shore safely in the teeth of a strong wind, which had sprung up, and which taxed the utmost powers of my companions, as they strained at the oars, but they declined to relinquish them to me. However, "all is well that ends well," and we finally arrived at our destination and parted good friends, with full content (on their side at least) with the day's happenings.

My next experience was in the Chateauguay River, where I was taken by a friend who had a shack there. It was the 16th of June, the opening day of the season for bass. We started at break of day for the Rapids, travelling in a bus which stopped to pick us up, and which we found filled with a party of boisterous young French-Canadians, who had apparently cele-

brated the opening of the season by staying up drinking all the night.

We crowded in, partly on the step and partly inside, and after a noisy passage, in due course arrived at the Rapids, where to my secret dismay, I found that it was necessary to wade waist-deep if there was to be any chance of catching a fish. I had no waders or change of clothes with me, and did not relish the idea of the return home in wet garments. However, I could not shirk doing as the others did, so we all entered the rushing water at varying distances apart, and proceeded to fish the rapids, some using spinners of different kinds, but the majority had artificial flies, which they cast and worked in the current.

The water was cold and small success fell to my share in this mode of angling, which was quite new to me, but I felt some consolation in observing that little better luck attended my companions. I must admit that I was not surprised at the results, for, as at Chambly, the water was over-run with fishermen, some of whom I could see were in no condition to wield a rod, and in fact they had all they could do to keep their footing on the stony bottom in the rapid current.

One young fellow fell down three times and had to be helped up by his companions. The last time he broke his rod and remained with his head partly submerged in the current, so he was

hauled ignominiously to the bank where he fell fast asleep in the sun.

The rest of us continued our efforts but with little success. The expert of the party who had accounted for the legal limit on the opening day of the previous year, was now unable to capture more than three small fish, and abandoned further attempts in disgust.

I forget the reason assigned for the poor sport. It was either that the wind was in a wrong quarter, or that the season was too cold, or the fish had not come up, or down, the river.

Anyhow, what I shall never forget is the walk home under a broiling sun on a dusty road with soaking trousers and sodden shoes, and while I appreciated the kindly intentions of my friend, who had arranged the trip, I felt that I had not yet fully attained my pleasant anticipations of abundant sport in Canadian waters.

Last Summer, however, I heard of a lake in the Laurentian Mountains where I was positively assured by a friend who had been there, that the fishing was excellent. I had had one experience of a visit to the Laurentians in the month of June, when I was nearly bitten to death by black-flies, and I had vowed "never again," for although I have lived many years in the West Indies and felt the stings of venomous mosquitoes, their bite is child's play compared with the stab of the black-fly. But I was assured that

there would be none in September, the month of my intended visit, so I decided to take another chance. On arriving, fellow-guests informed me with long faces that they could catch no fish in the lake, and that I might as well cast my line in St. Catherine Street in Montreal! This did not sound very hopeful, but after two days of almost fruitless effort with troll and worm resulting in the capture of a couple of small bass, I was inclined to agree with their opinion. The fish were not rising to the fly, nor taking any other kind of bait apparently.

On the third day, I betook myself to a neighbouring stream, where armed with a light 6 ounce cane rod, I succeeded in catching more than a dozen small brook-trout. As I approached one corner where the water swirled into a good-sized pool, I was surprised to see a long shadowy shape dart from under the overhanging bushes on the far bank, and make a grab at my fly. I struck as I felt the tug, but failed to hook the fish. He was evidently pricked, however, for he would not come back when I sent the flies down the stream again after a reasonable interval. So I changed my tactics and taking off the cast, threaded a nice lively red worm on a No. 6 hook with a light sinker a yard up the leader to keep it well submerged. Then keeping well away from the bank, I sent the bait round the corner into the shadows of the pool under the bushes. Imme-

diately, there was a flash and a tug, and I had the fish fast. Up and down the tiny stream he raged, and I followed, fearful of my slender leader, but keeping on as much strain as I dared. After ten minutes furious struggle, he began to weaken and I steered him to a shelving place on the bank, where I landed him, and found him to be a nice red trout weighing a pound and a half. It was of course a bit of luck finding him in such a small stream.

My landlord that night assured me that 'the lake was full of similar trout and that they were to be caught at the right season, i.e. when the weather was cooler. Following his instructions, early the next morning, before breakfast, I rowed my boat to a blasted pine-tree on the far end of the lake, where I found a small creek flowing in, almost hidden by overgrowing bushes. There I anchored, fishing towards the deep, and working the worm from place to place, and it was not long before I had caught a nice brace of speckled red beauties, which fought with refreshing vigour before they were brought to the net. They weighed a little short of two pounds each.

From that time on, the sport improved, and I was generally able to have trout for breakfast every morning during the rest of my stay, besides taking back a dozen on ice to Montreal.

My landlord said that the sport was better in a lake about seven miles distant, so a party of us

decided to visit it. There were three of us, a choir-master, a bank clerk and myself. The morning opened with torrents of rain, and as we journeyed in an open rig, the drive to our destination over a wretched road was not very pleasant, but I had taken the precaution of borrowing a suit of oil-skins from our host, so I was equipped for the worst. Our driver, a French boy, was optimistic, and assured us that the weather would clear, but we had our doubts. On reaching the lake, we found a fishing lodge where we were received by a French guide, who spoke hardly any English. However, with the aid of signs and such French words as we could muster, we managed to understand each other sufficiently.

The guide was anyhow very taciturn, and seemed depressed with the weather and the prospects of sport. He rowed us gloomily from one spot to another, remarking briefly, "Dees good place," and after waiting patiently while we failed to entice the fish to take our baits, he would shrug his shoulders philosophically, and say "No good! Try 'nother place." And so the long day sped while the rain fell steadily and drenched us. At last there was a lull, and we began to catch a few trout; at least the bank clerk and I caught some, but the choir-master was unsuccessful, and I am sure that the authorities of his church would have been shocked to hear his language, as he lashed the

water fruitlessly, and reviled the place, the weather, his luck, and finally the landlord for deceiving him into visiting his hotel.

At noon we adjourned to the lodge for luncheon, which we consumed around a blazing wood-fire on the spacious hearth in an endeavour to dry our soaked garments. Our repast consisted of tinned salmon and green tea, which latter the guide prepared by throwing huge handfuls of leaves into the pot until the liquid assumed the complexion and density of ink.

We resumed our sport (!) after lunch, but the break in the weather was of short duration and the rain again fell in torrents. In the intervals of baling out the boat, the guide, who wore no coat, shivered and shook with stoical endurance. At last about 3 o'clock he could stand it no longer and burst out with the following in a doleful voice :

“ Ver' cold ! Ver' wet ! Eet hell de hells ! ”

I thought it time to produce my flask, and we all had a nip, the guide draining the bottle dry, after which he permitted a smile of satisfaction to illumine his gloomy features for a moment, but he nevertheless seized the oars with alacrity when we decided to abandon our struggle against the elements.

We returned with about a score of small trout, the choir-master still preserving a blank record, and the following day he left for town in disgust, an example which I followed at the end

of the week, still wondering when I would strike the El Dorado of Canadian fishing.

This summer I felt certain I would at last enjoy some really good sport, for a fellow-worker in our office had just returned from his holiday and spoke in glowing terms of the charms of a lake on the Canadian Northern Railway in the Laurentians, and of the boarding establishment on its shore, where he had been staying. According to him, monstrous pickerel, bass, and enormous gray trout were to be had for the asking in the lake, while a stream near by was alive with brook-trout.

He was so emphatic that I allowed myself to be persuaded to change my plans, but, alas, it was the same old story over again—an indifferently-kept boarding-house, crowded with noisy trippers, and with a scanty food supply. Eggs for breakfast, ditto for supper, and for mid-day meal one meagre helping of meat and dessert—no second supply to be had for the asking. Even the coffee ran short at times, and a second cup was tabooed! One of the boarders named the place “Cacklebury Farm,” he was so satiated with the egg diet.

As for the fishing, the less said the better. The so-called trout stream turned out to be full of little chub. After three solid days of wading up and down, and disentangling chub minnows from my hooks, I was only able to

capture one solitary trout, which had evidently lost its way.

The lake was little better. Fine fishing and free boats had been advertised by the proprietor. The boats were free all right, but there were just three for the use of thirty boarders, and of these three, one was a cranky skiff no good for fishing, while only one of the two flat-bottomed boats was usable with any degree of comfort, for the other leaked to such an extent, that it was advisable to don your bathing dress when you took it out. Such as they were, however, there was a scramble for them each day after breakfast, the lucky ones secretly tickled at the discomfiture of the others who hid their disappointment under a pretended air of indifference, as they lounged around, keeping a sharp lookout however for any signs of a landing.

Having engaged my room for a week in advance, I decided to stick it out for a few days, but had very little luck in the way of fishing, however. One cloudy morning a fellow boarder and myself succeeded in securing the dry boat and discovered a large rock in a sheltered cove, where we managed to capture a dozen black bass, varying in size from half a pound to one and a quarter.

My stay was finally enlivened, however, through the intervention of a friend who, I discovered, had a nice house on the other side of the lake. On the last day of my stay, a re-

turned soldier, myself, and another boarder, took the skiff to an adjacent lake, where we were assured speckled trout abounded! We had to carry the boat over a rocky overgrown trail for a hundred yards or so, and then found ourselves in a small lake some couple of hundred yards in diameter, the edges of which were almost completely overgrown by pines, except at one end where two huge rocks rose steeply from the water.

We had some difficulty in launching our skiff through the tangle of undergrowth and fallen rotting trunks, which crowded the margin, and then, when we were launched, the fish, as usual, inconsiderately refused to be caught. This was not to be wondered at however, in view of the noise made in the boat by the soldier's son, an irrepressible little rascal some ten years old, who clamoured incessantly for movement from place to place. His chief idea of enjoyment was to hurl overboard with a resounding splash the stone which served as an anchor.

At noon we adjourned to the rocks where we stretched our limbs and had lunch. After lunch the soldier left his rod on the rock with the line in the water, and went round the corner to bale out the skiff. He had not been gone long when I heard a terrific screech of the reel and turned round to see the rod (a three-jointed steel affair) sliding swiftly down the side of the rock. I scrambled hastily after it, but was too late to

catch it before it plunged into the lake. On reaching the edge I could see that it rested point downward on the sloping rock some six feet under the water, just on the brink of a gloomy looking hole. I shouted lustily to the soldier to hurry up with the boat, but just as he was within an oar's length of the rock, the rod was jerked off the side and disappeared into the hole. I suggested to the soldier that he should dive in, but he feared a chill after his rheumatic experiences in the trenches, so I volunteered to go in, but was rather sorry I had done so, when I tested the temperature of the water with my toes. However, I put on a bold face and plunged down into the black depths of the hole. Down and down I went, past rocks and ugly looking timbers, keeping my eyes on the lookout for the rod, but I could see nothing of it and there seemed to be no bottom to the abysmal recesses of the hole, which was very black and dismal, so I deemed discretion the better part of valour and returned to the surface.

Thereafter ensued a series of grappling operations up and down and across the hole with a heavily weighted Dowagiac minnow at the end of a hand-line, while at intervals the fish, a nice looking speckled trout of about four pounds, would leap out of the water some twenty yards away, endeavouring to free itself from the hook.

In the midst of our efforts my friend arrived on the scene, having been to inquire for me at

the boarding house. He promptly took charge of the operations, and finally the line was grappled and the rod was brought into the boat. The fish was still on and very lively, so I reeled up and brought him alongside. Then to the chagrin of us all, the lad who handled the net bungled the landing and the fish wrenched himself free with a slap of his tail against the side of the boat. He certainly deserved his freedom.

It did not require much persuasion to induce me to leave the party and join my friend who had his motor boat handy. He was familiar with all the best fishing places in the big lake, and after tea at his house on the opposite shore, he took me out trolling, using a long copper wire with a silver minnow. For an hour or so we had no luck and then a heavy shower drove us to shore for shelter. On resuming later, we were passing between the shore and a large rock which lay out in the deep water, when I felt a savage jerk on the line, followed by a series of frantic rushes, but of course the fish had no chance of getting away with a copper line, and we soon yanked him into the boat where he thrashed about snapping his jaws fiercely. A few strokes on the back of his head soon settled him however. He was a fine pike, two feet eight inches in length and weighing a little over seven pounds. The following morning at breakfast I had the pleasure of enjoying some fried slices of his anatomy, and they tasted good.

